

VZCZCXRO8646
PP RUEHCN RUEHGH RUEHVC
DE RUEHHK #0021 0040859
ZNR UUUUU ZZH
P 040859Z JAN 07
FM AMCONSUL HONG KONG
TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC PRIORITY 9999
INFO RUEHOO/CHINA POSTS COLLECTIVE PRIORITY
RUEHGV/USMISSION GENEVA PRIORITY 1092
RUEHRC/DEPT OF AGRICULTURE WASHDC PRIORITY
RUEAUSA/DEPT OF HHS WASHINGTON DC PRIORITY
RUEHPH/CDC ATLANTA GA PRIORITY

UNCLAS HONG KONG 000021

SIPDIS

SENSITIVE
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STATE FOR EAP/CM AND EAP/EP TWANG
STATE FOR G/AIAG JLANGE, HFOSTER, RFENDRICK
STATE FOR M/MED AND M/MEDEX PETER WOOD
HHS FOR OGHA - STEIGER, ELVANDER, BHAT
BANGKOK FOR RMO, CDC
STATE PLEASE PASS TO USDA FOR DU/US LAMBERT
BEIJING FOR DSELIGSOHN

E.O. 12958: N/A

TAGS: [ECON](#) [TBIO](#) [SENV](#) [EAGR](#) [AMED](#) [KFLU](#) [HK](#) [CH](#)

SUBJECT: HONG KONG HEALTH OFFICIALS PROBE DEATH OF PIG
FARMERS

1. (SBU) Summary: The Hong Kong Centre for Health Protection (CHP) is investigating the June and December 2006 deaths of two Hong Kong pig farmers from a pneumonia-type illness. The Hong Kong government (HKG) reported that both men had traveled to mainland China's Guangdong province a few weeks before falling sick. CHP also revealed that they are investigating the illness of four other men) all employees of Hong Kong pig farms or slaughterhouses) who have been treated for unexplained pneumonia-like symptoms in the past four months. CHP set up an emergency hotline for pig farmers to contact health authorities if they fall sick. CHP contacted Mainland health officials about the illnesses after a Guangdong newspaper revealed that a Guangdong farmer died of similar causes on December 26. END SUMMARY.

2. (SBU) On December 29, Dr. Thomas Tsang, Consultant for the Centre for Health Protection, revealed that a 44-year old Hong Kong pig farmer died in mid-December of multiple organ failure caused by acute pneumonia. The farmer traveled to Dongguan (Guangdong province) twenty days before his death and had been admitted to the hospital shortly after his return to Hong Kong. Tsang also revealed that a 65-year old pig farmer died of similar pneumonia-like symptoms in Hong Kong on June 4, 2006. That man visited the mainland city of Shenzhen a few weeks before he fell ill. The Hong Kong government began exploring possible links between the two deaths after a December 26 report in a mainland newspaper that a Guangdong pig farmer died of similar symptoms. Tsang stated that Hong Kong has contacted Mainland health authorities to learn more about the death in Guangdong.

3. (SBU) Hong Kong newspapers report that four other men have come down with similar symptoms in Hong Kong. One pig farmer was hospitalized in October for lung and kidney problems. Three other men) all employees of the same Hong Kong slaughterhouse) have undergone or are undergoing treatment for pneumonia-type illnesses. The first man was hospitalized in September; the other two were admitted to hospital in December. One of the ill patients recently traveled to Guangdong province (Zhuhai, Panyu, and Guangzhou). Tests show he is suffering from a pneumonia-causing pneumococcus and parainfluenza virus. Dr. Tsang said that CHP was reviewing all Hong Kong Hospital

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Authority (HA) records from May-December 2006 to identify other pig farmers and slaughterhouse workers who have been hospitalized with pneumonia.

¶3. (SBU) Officials from Hong Kong's Agriculture, Fisheries and Conservation Department (AFCD) have examined local livestock, but found no illnesses or abnormalities in the pigs. AFCD requested all Hong Kong pig farms report any disease outbreaks among livestock. AFCD also reminded farmers to improve sanitation conditions and conduct timely inoculation of livestock. The HKG opened a hotline for farm and slaughterhouse workers to report both human and animal illnesses.

¶4. (SBU) Hong Kong legislator Kwok Ka-ki said the public should treat this outbreak very seriously in case it spreads beyond pig workers. He underscored that Hong Kong is not "overreacting" and that the "best way to tackle infectious diseases is by raising awareness." Another infectious disease specialist expressed concern over the government's delay in linking the seven cases. In a public press statement, the HKG stated that it will hold an interdepartmental meeting to discuss the deaths and propose next steps. The meeting will include officials from CHP, AFCD, HA, the Food and Environmental Hygiene Department, and the Health, Welfare and Food Bureau.
Sakaue